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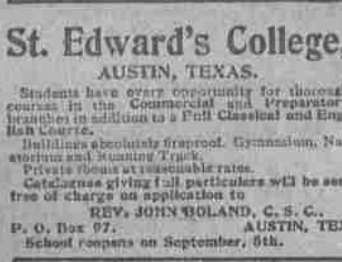
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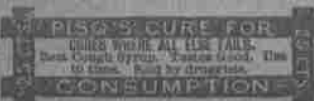
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THE LION'S WHELP

A Story of Cromwell's Time

BY AMELIA E. BARR

Author of "The Bow of Orange Ribbon," "I, Thow and the Other One," "The Maid of Maiden Lane," Etc.

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CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

"This is all very fine indeed," said Mrs. Swaffham, almost weeping in her anger, "but you need not praise this man to me. He has slain the King of England, and turned out the English Parliament, and pray what next? He will make himself King and Elizabeth Cromwell Queen. Shall we indeed bow down to them? Not I, for one."

"Be at peace, Martha," said Gen. Swaffham, "here are things to consider of far greater import than the Cromwell women. How the nation will take this affair remains to be seen."

"I look for measureless wrath and vain hubbub, and threats heard far and wide," said Doctor Verity. "The people have been given what they wanted, and twenty to one they will now say-ay all they have feared for. That would be like the rest of their ways."

For once Doctor Verity was wrong. This master-stroke of Cromwell's went straight to the heart of London. "Not a dog barked against it," said Cromwell to his friends, and he was to all intents and purposes right. Those who called it "usurpation" confessed that it was an usurpation of capability, in place of one of incapability.

CHAPTER X.

Rupert and Cluny.

When the Jervys arrived in Paris, they went immediately to the beautiful Hotel de France, which Sir Thomas had rented for their residence while in the city.

One afternoon Matilda stood at a window watching the crowds passing incessantly. To the right was the palace of the great King Louis, and not far away the palace of his Eminence, the great Cardinal Mazarin.

She was dressed for her lover, and waiting his arrival, her soul flashing from her watching eyes, her whole

"We have sold all our cargoes," he said triumphantly. "In spite of old Cromwell's remonstrances. What can Cromwell do? Will he go to war with France for a merchant's bill of lading?"

"I will tell you something, Rupert. I had a letter to-day from my friend, Mistress Jane Swaffham. She says her lover, Lord Cluny Neville, must be in Paris about this time, and that he will call on me. He is on Cromwell's business; there is no doubt of it."

"What is the appearance of Neville? I think I saw him this morning."

Then Matilda described the young lord, and the particularity of her knowledge regarding his eyes and hair and voice and manner did not please Prince Rupert.

"A very haughty youth," said Rupert when the conversation was resumed. "He was with the Cardinal this morning. And now I begin to remember his business was such as in a manner concerns us. 'Twas about a merchant ship which that old farmer on King Charles' throne wants payment for. My men took it in fair fight, and 'tis against all usage to give back spoils."

They talked of these things until Rupert's engagements called him away, then they rose, and leaning towards each other, walked slowly down the long splendid room together.

She went then to find her uncle and aunt. But she quickly noticed in them an air of anxiety and gloom, and it annoyed her.

"Is anything particularly wrong, aunt? Have I been making some trouble about?"

"Sir Thomas is very unhappy, niece. He has heard news that frightens him, and we are longing to be in the peace and safety of our own home."

"You are going to lose a little gold, and so you are wretched, and must go to the City-of-the-Miserable."

"I am not going to lose a penny."

"Well, then?"



"Take your life from my hand."

sweet body at attention. When to ordinary ears there would have been nothing to give notice, Matilda heard a step. She let Jane's letter drop to her feet and stood facing the door with hands dropped and tightly clasped.

A moment later the footsteps were very distinct; they were ascending the stairway quickly, portentously. A perfectly ravishing light spread itself over Matilda's face. Then the door flew open and Prince Rupert entered; "entered," however, being too small a word, for with the opening of the door he was on his knees at Matilda's feet, his arms were round her waist, she had bent her face to his, they were both near to weeping and knew it not, for love must weep when it snatches from some hard Fate's control the hours that years have sighed for.

Rupert loved Matilda. All the glory and the sorrow of his youth were in that love, and as he knelt at her feet in his princely, soldierly splendor there was nothing lacking in the picture of romantic devotion. "Adorable, ravishing, Mata!" he cried. "At your feet I am paid for my life's misery." And Matilda leaned towards him till their handsome faces touched, and Rupert could look into her eyes, soft and laughing with an equal affection.

For a little while their conversation was purely personal, but their own interests were so blent with public affairs that it was not possible to separate them for any length of time.

He had not long to wait for an opportunity to meet Neville. While he was playing billiards the following afternoon with the Duke of York, his equerry arrived at the Palais Royale with his horse. Neville had taken the northern road out of the city, and it was presumably the homeward road. Rupert followed quickly, but Neville was a swift, steady rider, and he was not overtaken till twenty miles had been covered, and the daylight was nearly lost in the radiance of the full moon. Rupert put spurs to his horse, passed Neville at a swift gallop, then suddenly wheeling, came at a rush towards him, catching his bridle as they met.

"You will alight. I have a quarrel to settle with you."

"On what ground?"

"Say it is on the ground of your mistress. I am Earl de Wick's friend."

"I will not fight on such pretense. My mistress would deny me if I did."

"Fight for your honor, then."

Neville laughed. "I know better. And before what you call Honor, I put Duty."

"Then fight for the papers and money in your possession. I want them."

"Ha! I thought so. You are a robber, it seems. But I warn you that I am a good swordsman."

"Heaven and hell! What do I care? If you do not alight at once, I will slay your horse. You shall fight me, here and now, with or without pretense."

Then Neville flung himself from his horse and tied the animal to a tree. Rupert did likewise, and the two men rapidly removed such of their garments as would interfere with their bloody play. They were in a lonely road, partially shaded with great trees. Not a human habitation was visible, and there were no seconds to see justice done in the fight, or secure help after it, if help was needed. But at this time the lack of recognized formalities was no impediment to the duel. Rupert quickly found that he had met his match. Neville left him not a moment's breathing space, but never followed up his attacks, until at last Rupert called out incoherently, "When are you going to kill me?"

The angry impatience of the inquiry probably induced a moment's carelessness, and Rupert did not notice that in the struggle their ground had inausurably been changed, and Neville now stood directly in front of a large tree. Not heeding the impediment, Rupert made a fierce thrust with the point of his sword, which Neville evaded by a vault to one side, so that Rupert's sword striking the tree, sprang from his hand at the impact. As it fell to the ground, Neville reached it first, and placed his foot upon it. Rupert stood still and bowed gravely. He was at Neville's mercy, and he indicated his knowledge of this fact by the proud stillness of his attitude.

"It was an accident," said Neville, "and an accident is God's part in any affair. Take your life from my hand. I have no will to wish your death." He offered his hand as he spoke, and Rupert took it frankly, answering:

"Thou no disgrace to take life from one so gallant and generous, and I am glad that I can repay the favor of your clemency," then he almost whispered in Cluny's ear three words, and the young man started visibly, and with great haste untied his horse.

"We would better change horses," said Rupert; "mine is a Barb, swift as the wind."

But Cluny could not make the change proposed without some delay, his papers and jewels being bestowed in his saddle linings. So with a good wish the two men parted, and there was no anger between them—admiration and good-will had taken its place. Neville hastened forward, as he had been advised, and Rupert returned to Paris. He knew Matilda was expecting him, and he pictured to himself her disappointment and anxiety at his non-appearance. Yet he was physically exhausted, and as soon as he threw himself upon a couch he forgot all his weariness and all his anxieties in a deep sleep.

Early next morning he went to Matilda.

"How could you so cruelly disappoint me?" she cried. "You see now that our time is nearly gone; in a few hours we must part, perhaps forever."

"My dearest, loveliest Mata, I was about your pleasure. I was following Lord Neville, and he took me further than I expected."

"Lord Neville again! The man is an incubus! Why did you follow him?"

"You wished me to give him a lesson. He was going homeward. I had to ride last night, or let him escape. By my troth, I had only your pleasure in mind."

"Oh, but the price paid was too great! I had to give up your society for hours. That is a loss I shall mourn to the end of my life. I hope, then, that you killed him. Nothing less will suffice for it."

"I was out of fortune, as I always am. I had an accident, and was at his mercy. He gave me my life."

(To be continued.)